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Gallery and Studio

WATTS AND HIS PICTURES.



GEORGE FREDERICK WATTS, nearly sixty of whose works are on view at the Metropolitan Museum of Fine Arts this month, holds a unique place in modern English art. Hardly to be classed with those who were once "pre-Raphaelites," he yet has an affinity with Burne-Jones and Rossetti, although much more robust in style than the former, and much less a master of technical resources than the latter. Like Jones, Rossetti and (of late years) Madox Brown, he works in an atmosphere of dreams; he exercises an idealizing vision, rather than occupies himself with exact reproduction of the more accustomed aspect of things. But, unlike those painters, he is supremely strong in portraiture—developing there a perception of the actual, which it would be hard to match among his more loudly heralded contemporaries.

Born in 1818 (or, according to some, 1820), Mr. Watts first exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1837; a few years later he gained two competition prizes, by large historical designs for the new Parliament Houses. Thus it will be seen that he won recognition quite early in his career; but he has since dwelt much in retirement, painting slowly and seldom sending to the exhibitions. His closest professional associates are Sir Frederick Leighton and Val Prinsep. He, as well as Leighton, studied in Italy for a time, and the influence of that study appears in some of his works, making a decided contrast with others which embody distinctively English inspiration. The not very accurately named "Fata Morgana," for instance, seems to follow the traditions of Tintoret and Titian, in a measure, and contains a nude female figure, the upper half of which is almost perfect—firm and natural in texture, exquisite in tone. His portraits, too, show that he has carefully observed and profoundly comprehended the old Venetians. Swinburne has aptly pointed out in one of them the similarity to Morone's qualities.

One of his noblest performances, the "Sir Galahad" (now owned by Mrs. Eustace Smith of London), will unfortunately not be seen in New York; but his "Love and Death," held by many to be his crowning work, is at the Museum: so also is the companion-

piece, "Love and Life." This last is somewhat arid in conception. The typifying of the human journey by a flight of sharp, rocky steps, up which Love as a young man—very different from the anguished Cupid of "Love and Death"—tenderly leads a woman, is too conventional and academic. Both figures, however, are undraped, and offer interesting portrayal of form and good flesh-painting. An example of grim and powerful imagination may be found in the "Paolo and Francesca," which is thoroughly independent and suggests instructive comparison with the treatment of this theme by Doré and Ary Scheffer. The allegory of "Time, Death and Judgment," though crude and, as one might say, "uncanny" in its coloring, is at the same time very strong. It calls out to us as with

pallid tones, but is saved from weakness or morbidity by the strength of the sentiment and drawing. It is no ordinary mythological illustration that Mr. Watts has presented, but rather a modern poet's recreation of the ancient legend. Indeed, it is always to be noticed that Watts's conceptions are very generally original, individual, marked by great sincerity—even though to minds unfamiliar with his mode of thought and the atmosphere in which he lives, that sincerity may at times seem so uncouth or so out-of-the-way in expression as to take on an appearance almost of affectation.

Other works which have contributed to his celebrity are "Endymion," "The Creation of Eve," "Cain," "The Temptation of Eve" and "Ariadne."

Taking all things together, the "Endymion" may be called one of the most nearly perfect of his works. Sombre, shadowy, and yet ethereally graceful, it unites dark, melting tints and delicate gradations of light with a wondrous harmony of line and flowing drapery, a subtle effect of visionary movement. The lips of Diana have not yet touched those of the enamored shepherd, yet I do not know any picture which more completely gives the impression of a pure, ideal kiss. The execution, also, is delicate and good.

The portraits painted by Mr. Watts include a Tennyson, full of sensitiveness and concentrated fire; a Robert Browning, vigorous, thoughtful, representing the man of the world who still beholds the world poetically; a singularly accurate and sympathetic likeness of Burne-Jones; one of Swinburne, another of Carlyle. Cardinal New-

man, James Stuart Mill, William Morris and others also find places in this remarkable collection. Portraiture may be used either to mask, or to unmask, character. Mr. Watts has the rare and marvellous ability to employ it in both ways at once; for he reproduces the form, features, coloring of a physiognomy with exact truth, and yet, in doing so, likewise reveals with extraordinary magic the personality residing behind that surface. There are several portraits of women (for "Bianca" and "Virginia" are virtually portraits), including the famous "Lady Lindsay, of Balcarres," among those shown here; and these, while they do not all possess the same depth, as the masculine heads, are sometimes charming in character and fortunate in color. Comyns Carr



GEORGE FREDERICK WATTS. FACSIMILE OF AN ETCHING BY PROFESSOR ALPHONSE LEGROS.

trumpet-tones. It is, in a manner, a revelation. Mr. Watts is here seen in his full force as a thinker who paints; one who, much of the time, is irresistibly impelled to put a moral into his pictures. But there is this difference between him and sundry artists who have made the moral interest predominant: with him it is spontaneous, unforced. In "Orpheus and Eurydice," the story of the Thracian bard is told with extreme pathos, in a composition of considerable merit, albeit a painful one. Eurydice falls dead and livid in his arms, as Orpheus tries to draw her with him from the caverns of Hades, and the bard—his primitive lyre fallen to the ground—recognizes with horror that he has lost her forever. The coloring of this, as nearly as I can recall, is in a minor key of bluish, greenish and

wrote of Watts, in *L'Art*: "His ideas are quite his own, but his individuality does not affirm itself with equal force in his style and his execution. In the general tonality of his paintings, the predominance of certain tints which re-

cur in his works, one recognizes the sway of an artistic tradition, rather than direct study of nature. Now, the essential vice of a system depending on a tradition is precisely to arrest the impulse of a fresh and vigorous imagination, instead of swiftly obeying its solicitations." It may be admitted that Watts does not strive so much for reproduction of the real, as for the building up of harmonies in color, based on some theme suggested by his own mind. But, if he sometimes strikes a discord, the theme is at least always related to some combination which he has seen in nature; his drawing, though often faulty, rests upon long and assiduous study of the real; and I know that for many years he has been a diligent experimenter in technical processes—the absorbent quality of canvas, the grinding of pure colors, the various ways of laying on pigments.

Were he to abandon imaginative coloring, for realistic, he would be renouncing his mission as the possessor of a peculiar, idealistic insight. We must take him as he is; and, doing that, we shall see that he can teach us what few living men can. The poetry of his designs has, by one writer, been said to recall "a strain of music by Beethoven, or a wide-reaching and sustained phrase by Handel, and lines of written poetry by Milton." In any case, it is certain that whatever his reflective or moralizing tendency, and no matter how much care he may have for his idea, he never forgets that he is a painter, whose first

duty is to bring forms and colors into an effective unity. He has in him much of the large, creative spirit of the old masters; and this, in a modern painter, we cannot afford to overlook or underrate. G. P. LATHROP.

ALPHONSE LEGROS.

CONCLUSION.

ALTHOUGH Legros habitually takes but a few proofs

Museum about a hundred, generally mediocre and of the latest states; the Museum of Dijon, perhaps fifty choice impressions. The names of the principal private collectors who make a speciality of collecting

Legros etchings are: Seymour Haden, C. Ionides, Sir G. Howard, and A. W. Thibaudau of London, and Philippe Burty and A. P. Malassis, of Paris. No one of these gentlemen possesses a complete set, and it is doubtful if, all together, they could show one. In many cases only one proof is known.

The reason of this is that when, in 1857 or thereabout, M. Legros first essayed etching, the art was cultivated only by a very few, who were naturally drawn to it, not as affording a means of reproduction, but because of its artistic capabilities solely. At that time it would have been of little use to have taken many proofs as no one would buy them. Consequently such etchings as were produced were purely due to the love of the artists for the process. They worked for themselves, or, at most, for a few friends; and when the limited number

of proofs which they wished were taken, the plate was destroyed or ground down to be used again. It was not, as M. Malassis says, the golden age of etchers, but it was that of etchings.

No one would then have believed that etching could ever become a popular, commercial, paying form of art. Not only the etchers, but the printers of that now almost legendary period, worked without thought of lucre. In truth, Delâtre, who printed Legros's earlier works, could not have grown rich out of them, as there were never more than ten impressions taken—frequently only one. Legros watched the work and often snatch-

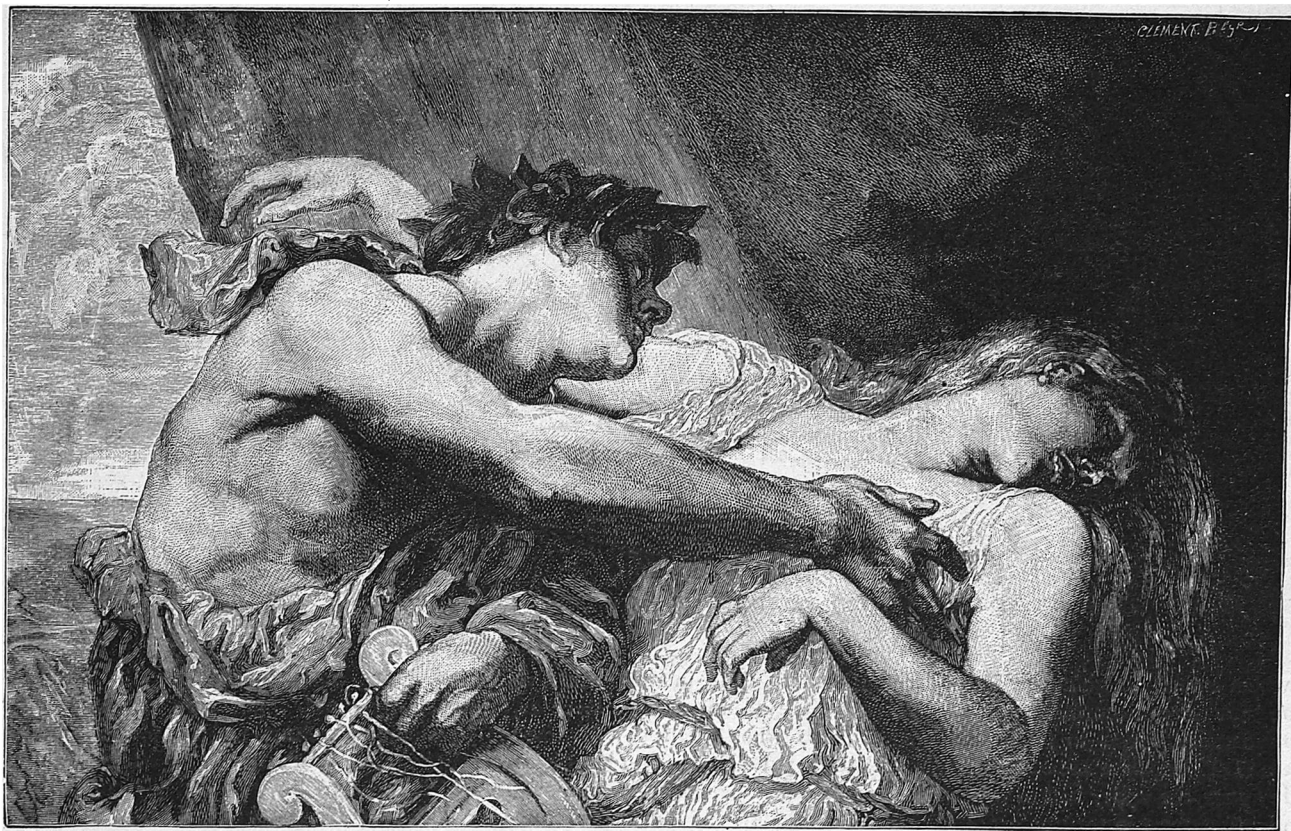
ed away the plate, disappointed with the result, after a mere trial proof had been obtained.

Beside the series of portraits of which a few have been mentioned, and the larger and perhaps more



"DIANA AND ENDYMION." BY GEORGE FREDERICK WATTS.

IN THE LOAN COLLECTION AT THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART, NEW YORK.



"ORPHEUS AND EURYDICE." BY GEORGE FREDERICK WATTS.

IN THE LOAN COLLECTION AT THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART, NEW YORK.

his work will ultimately be very large. Up to the present, the best proofs have remained in the hands of private collectors. The Cabinet des Estampes possesses about a dozen inferior proofs; the British